AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

In the prefaces to the former editions of this work on operative surgery I
have specially emphasised the fact that the more surgery has become the
common property of medical men, the more it is incumbent on any one who
intends to devote himself to practical surgery to take every opportunity of
improving his technique. This is essential, because any general practitioner
of repute may be suddenly called upon to take charge of a surgical depart-
ment in a country hospital. The responsibility of such a position must
weigh heavily upon the conscientious practitioner if he has not had a
thorough training as a clinical assistant in a hospital, as he may be
required at any moment to decide instantly on a course of action on which
may depend not only the future health but even the life of the patient.
Unless he wishes to be classed among those who resort to exploratory
incisions on all occasions regardless of risk, he must learn how to make an
exact diagnosis and to establish precise indications for treatment. This
necessitates the stern discipline of a long clinical assistantship. The
requisite dexterity in operating is acquired in a shorter apprenticeship to a
good practical surgeon.

The possession of these requisite would destroy the favourite arguments
of those physicians who are inclined to disparage surgery and belittle its
successes. They maintain that the cases are innumerable in which un-
necessary and even injurious operations are performed, and they are apt to
hold the whole profession responsible for such unwarranted operations under-
taken by men of little experience.

Just as the physician is not permitted to write prescriptions without a
knowledge of the action and effects of drugs, so the surgeon should not be
allowed to perform operations unless he is capable of first making an exact
diagnosis and prognosis.

Even if we admit that the surgeon is responsible for the results of his
operations, it must never be forgotten that omissions and blunders in the